

'Cute, affectionate' hedgehogs becoming popular pets

By BRUCE STAPLEY
Correspondent

A project done as part of a college business course has turned into a lucrative venture for Stouffville area resident Jennifer Jones.

Jones, along with her four school-aged children, started up Markham Creek Exotic Pets from their Ninth Line home, set on a 10-acre property this past March.

The family breeds and sells African pygmy hedgehogs. The brownish-grey animals, which weigh up to two pounds when fully grown, were introduced to North America five years ago, proving themselves to be low-maintenance and child-friendly.

According to Jones, the hedgehogs are odor-free, unlike guinea pigs and hamsters.

They are not given to nipping at the fingers of curious youngsters who get too



Mike Jones and Sonic the hedgehog at Markham Creek Exotic Pets on Ninth Line.
Photo: LORI EMMERSON

close to their cages, and they are non-allergenic. "They are clean and they are cute and affectionate," said Jones.

"They roll up into a ball, then when they are held, they unfurl. They bond to one person, whom they recognize by smell. But they'll relax with anyone after just a few minutes."

Jones decided to go into business after receiving a positive response to a project completed while taking a business course at Centennial College. In it, she outlined a plan for raising and marketing the hedgehog. Since then, she has built up an inventory of 40 of the animals. The hedgehogs are housed in the

basement in a temperature-controlled environment which guarantees the temperature doesn't drop below the required 65 degrees Fahrenheit.

Jones receives daily help from her children, aged five through 14. "The kids clean the cages and feed them every night. And they play with them as well."

Jones said the children are anxious to take their hedgehogs to school to show them off. The response so far has been encouraging, said Jones, although she has had to educate people about the relatively unknown breed.

"There's lots of marketing involved. People don't know what

hedgehogs are, unlike in Europe where they run wild."

She set up at the recent Bracebridge Sportsmen Show and was the biggest drawing card there, she said.

The fact that hedgehogs are non-allergenic has made them popular with families with members allergic to other pets, said Jones.

Also, they are easy to maintain and feeding is as simple as opening a pouch of dry cat food.

In addition to the hedgehogs, the Jones' property also serves as a refuge for Muscovy ducks, pygmy goats, Siberian huskies and sugar gliders.

Replanting good for perennials

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loss from the plants until the roots become established. If the leaves are marked with brown spots cut them back completely.

If replanting in the same location amend the soil as necessary, adding some compost or bonemeal.

A good clump will be formed by placing three to seven divisions in a triangular or staggered pattern about six inches apart with all the leaf fans facing in the same direction.

This is preferably to placing the divisions in a circle with the fans facing out as all new growth would be outward making a hollow centred ring.

To make a drift rather than a clump set the divisions in a curved single line either behind or in front of other clumps of perennials.

When planting each division dig two slanted holes about two inches apart and five inches deep leaving a shallow ridge of soil between them.

Set the rhizome on the soil ridge and spread half the roots into each hole. Firm the soil

around the roots and cover the rhizome not more than an inch deep.

This will produce better results than the old method of planting rhizomes sitting above the soil. In dry weather water occasionally until new growth appears.

A summer mulch to conserve moisture should circle the plant but not cover the rhizome or leaf base.

If you would like to obtain some exciting new varieties, the Canadian Iris Society will have their annual auction and sale at the Civic Garden Centre, 777 Lawrence Ave. E. in Toronto on Aug. 19.

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